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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001776

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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ' NEW PARTY: DISCIPLINING DISCUSSION

REF: CARACAS 001671 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. President Chavez continues to face serious internal challenges to his efforts to forge a single pro-government party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). Most recently, Chavez' new PSUV discipline committee stripped Francisco Ameliach, Chavez' 2006 presidential campaign manager and a political heavyweight, of his party coordinating role in the National Assembly (NA) and his chairmanship of the NA Defense Committee. Ameliach was punished for merely forwarding parliamentarians' concerns about the PSUV party formation process to Chavez and for publicly suggesting that Chavez' former party, the MVR, may need to be "dusted off" for 2008 local elections. The PSUV is now slated to elect local leaders starting on September 29 and to hold a founding party congress starting on October 20, much later than originally planned. Rather than foster unity within Chavismo, the PSUV party formation process so far is creating and exposing divisions among Chavez' leading supporters. End Summary.

Chavez Disciplines Party Loyalist

¶2. (SBU) President Chavez announced during his August 25 speech to United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) activists that he passed the name of a "national leader" to the PSUV's new discipline committee. Chavez named Miranda Governor Diosdado Cabello to head the committee. Vice President Jorge Rodriguez, Education Minister Adan Chavez, National Assembly President Cilia Flores, National Assembly Member Eustoquio Contreras, former Nutrition Minister Erika Farias, Science and Technology Minister Hector Navarro, Lara Governor Luis Reyes Reyes, and National Assembly Second Vice President Roberto Hernandez reportedly make up the rest of the committee.

¶3. (SBU) Francisco Ameliach, the head of Chavez' 2006 re-election campaign, was stripped of his PSUV coordinating role in the National Assembly and replaced as head of the NA's Defense Committee on August 29. Ameliach told reporters September 5 that he erred by suggesting to the media that if the PSUV was not ready to compete in 2008 gubernatorial and mayoral elections, Chavez' Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) should be "dusted off" to lead pro-government supporters into the local elections. Ameliach also confirmed that he

synthesized NA members' concerns with the PSUV party formation process to date in a memo that he sent to Chavez.

¶ 14. (SBU) BRV officials have tried to minimize the disciplining of Ameliach and the party's internal divisions. NA President Flores suggested that Ameliach requested to be removed from his party and NA committee responsibilities for health reasons. Former PPT member and National Assembly delegate Mario Isea, who took over Ameliach's PSUV coordinating role within the NA, said Ameliach's "temporary" removal from the NA PSUV coordinating role was a consensus decision among the six NA PSUV coordinators. In his September 4 press conference, Vice President Rodriguez denied that NA members wrote a letter listing their concerns about the PSUV party formation process.

¶ 15. (SBU) NA Assembly members Luis Tascon and Iris Varela have expressed support for Ameliach. They also publicly suggested that the PSUV should instead punish UN Ambassador Francisco Arias Cardenas and PSUV Promotion Committee Member Lina Ron for noting that apathy among PSUV battalions could hurt Chavista efforts to secure passage of Chavez' proposed constitutional changes in a public referendum. Former Military General Staff Chief General Alberto Muller Rojas, who presided over the initial PSUV creation commission, told the media August 30 that he disagreed with the formation of a PSUV disciplinary committee, noting that he prefers "education" to "alienation."

New Timeline for PSUV Formation

¶ 16. (SBU) Vice President Jorge Rodriguez also announced a new timeline September 4 for the formation of the PSUV. Rodriguez said PSUV's over 20,000 battalions of between 200 to 400 "aspiring militants" would elect spokespersons on

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September 29, as well as four persons in charge of policy-ideology, organization, propaganda, and social work. These initial party elections were abruptly postponed on August 17 in the wake of poorly attended battalion meetings (Reftel).

¶ 17. (SBU) A second election among battalion spokespersons is slated to elect 1400 delegates to the party's founding congress by October 13. Rodriguez said the founding party congress would begin on October 20 and run as long as the delegates deem necessary. PSUV organizers had previously announced that the party congress would run from September 8 to December 15. Rodriguez also noted that PSUV delegates would not elect PSUV national leaders until early 2008.

Comment

¶ 18. (C) The disciplining of political heavyweight Francisco Ameliach, Chavez' 2006 presidential campaign manager and a former president of the National Assembly, demonstrates how little room Chavez allows for constructive dissent in the PSUV formation process and how humbling the price of "rehabilitation" can be. In his September 5 "mea culpa" message to the local media, Ameliach stressed that "The only leader is Hugo Chavez" and that "A revolution without Chavez is impossible." Chavez' making an example of Ameliach again exposed real divisions among pro-Chavez leaders in an uncharacteristically public way.

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